

WELCOME TO KOSSUTH.

REMARKS

OF

HON. STEPHEN A. DOUGLAS,

ON THE

JOINT RESOLUTION WELCOMING GOVERNOR KOSSUTH.

DELIVERED

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES, DECEMBER 11, 1851.

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R E M A R K S.

The Senate having under consideration Mr. BERRIEN'S amendment to the Joint Resolution introduced by Mr. SEWARD extending to Louis Kossuth a welcome in the name of the People of the United States—

Mr. DOUGLAS rose and said: Mr. President, I shall not long detain the Senate.

I regret that this resolution has been introduced, not because I do not cordially unite, with all my sympathies, in the proposed measures for the reception of Governor Kossuth, but for the reason that it could not pass this body unanimously. A resolution to give such a reception as has been proposed should pass with entire unanimity; for its discussion and a divided vote deprive it of its chief merit. I would not have brought forward the resolution for the simple reason, that I have yet to learn that the man lives, or ever did live, that could make a proposition in this body that would not give rise to discussion. It has been objected to this resolution, sir, that its passage would give offence to the principal Powers of Europe. I have heard this objection raised in relation to so many matters of legislation that I have become heartily tired of it. I do not deem it material whether the reception of Governor Kossuth will give offence to the crowned heads of Europe, provided it does not violate the laws of nations, and give just *cause* of offence. The question with me is, not whether it will be agreeable to the despotic Powers of Europe; for I well know that they will not be pleased with any action of this Republic which gives encouragement to European movements favorable to liberal institutions; the question, therefore, is not whether they will be pleased or displeased, but whether the adoption of such a resolution gives just cause of offence, according to the laws of nations. Sir, I know of no principle of the law of nations that deprives a Republic of the right of expressing its cordial sympathy in all movements tending to the establishment of free principles throughout the world. I hold that it is our duty to demonstrate our heartfelt sympathy and profound admiration, by every act which is appropriate to the occasion and to the subject-matter. It is due to our own character, in vindication of the history of our revolutionary struggles, which resulted in the establishment of republican institutions upon this Continent.

But while it is our duty to do this much, I would take no step which would violate any principle of the law of nations, or give just cause of offence to any Power on earth. Nor do I think that a cordial welcome to Governor Kossuth, accompanied by the expression of our devotion to the cause with which his life is identified, and our sincere desire for his entire success, can be properly construed into such cause of offence. The distinguished Senator from Michigan has well remarked that it has been the usual practice of all enlightened nations in Europe to give a welcome and an asylum to all exiles who have been unsuccessful in their struggle for liberty in their native land. He has referred to the example of England, and might also have cited that of France during the period that he represented this nation with so much honor and dignity at the Court of Louis Philippe. If my recollection serves me right, Louis Philippe, for many years, in his annual speech from the throne, expressed his heartfelt desire and strongest hopes for the restoration of the *nationality of Poland*, which had been divided and apportioned among the Powers composing the Holy Alliance of despotism. He did not stop there, for, under the direction of his Minister of Finance, between one and two millions of francs were appropriated each year for the support of the several thousand exiles then in his own capital, waiting an opportunity, like Kossuth and his associates, to return and engage in the struggle for the independence and freedom of their native land.

If, then, a King, in the heart of Europe, could from his throne express such a desire in behalf of unfortunate Poland, and at the same time could tax his people to raise millions of money for the support of the patriotic exiles, without giving cause of offence to his brother Kings, shall it be said that Democratic America is not to be permitted to grant a hearty welcome to an exile who has become the representative of liberal principles throughout the world, lest despotic Austria and Russia shall be offended? We should not close our eyes to the fact, that a great movement is in progress, which threatens the existence of every absolute government in Europe. It will be a struggle between liberal and absolute principles—between Republicanism and Despotism. Are we to remain cold and indifferent spectators when the time of action shall arrive, and the exciting scene shall be presented to our view? Will it not become our duty to do whatever the interests, honor, and glory of our own country may require, in pursuance of the laws of nations, to give encouragement to that great movement? Should we not recognize the independence of each Republic as soon as it shall be established; open diplomatic intercourse, and form commercial treaties; and, in short, extend the right hand of fellowship, tendering all the courtesies and privileges which should exist between friendly nations of the same political faith? I think that the bearing of this country should be such as to demonstrate to all mankind that America sympathizes with the popular movement against despotism, whenever and wherever made. I hold that the principle laid down by Governor Kossuth as the basis of his action—that each State has a right to dispose of her own destiny, and regulate her internal affairs in her own way, without the interference of any foreign Power—is an axiom in the laws of nations which every State ought to recognize and respect. I am prepared now to assert and

affirm the proposition by a vote of the Senate, as a part of the international code. It is equally clear to my mind, that any violation of this principle by one nation, intervening for the purpose of destroying the liberties of another, is such an infraction of the international code as would authorize any State to interpose which should conceive that it had sufficient interest in the question to become the vindicator of the laws of nations. The armed intervention of Russia to deprive Hungary of her constitutional rights, was such a violation of the laws of nations as authorized England or the United States to interfere and prevent the consummation of the deed, if either had chosen to do so. If another alliance shall be formed by the despots of Europe to destroy the last vestige of freedom that now remains, the question will then arise, what course interest, duty, and honor, require us to pursue? We will have the right, under the law of nation, to interfere or not, according to our convictions of duty, when the case shall be presented. I will not say, as most Senators have said, that in no event will I be for interference by this Government. I will judge of the case when it arises. To say in advance that the United States will not interfere in vindication of the laws of nations, is to give our consent that Russia may interfere, in violation of the international code, to destroy the liberties of an independent nation. Such a declaration would afford as much encouragement to Russia and Austria in the consummation of their work of blood and vengeance, as a similar declaration by our Government on a recent occasion did in instigating Spain to butcher American citizens without the form of trial, and in violation of treaty stipulations. I will make no such declaration. I will grant no such license to the absolute governments of Europe. On the other hand, I will not advise the declaration in advance that we will interfere. Such a declaration might be looked upon as a blustering, empty threat. I would make no declaration upon the subject either way until the proper occasion shall arise. I would have this Republic retain within herself the control over her own action, so that we may be in condition to do whatever our interests and duty may require when the time for action comes. I think this is the most dignified and imposing position our country can occupy. It gives us the control of our own movements, and enables us to perform our duties to ourself and to the rest of the world according to our convictions from day to day and year to year, as the occasion shall present itself.

Sir, something has been said about an alliance with England, to restrain the march of Russia over the European Continent. I am free to say that I desire no alliance with England, or with any other crowned head. I am not willing to acknowledge that America needs England as an ally to maintain the principles of our Government. Nor am I willing to go to the rescue of England to save her from the power of the Autocrat, until she assimilates her institutions to ours. Hers is a half-way house between despotism and republicanism. She is responsible, as much as any Power in Europe, for the failure of the revolutionary movements which have occurred within the last four years. English diplomacy, English intrigue, and English perfidy put down the revolution in Sicily and in Italy, and was the greatest barrier to its success even in Hungary. So long as England shall, by her diplomacy, attempt

to defeat liberal movements in Europe, I am utterly averse to an alliance with her to sustain her monarch, her nobles, and her privileged classes. England must sustain her constitutional monarchy, even against absolutism, without receiving aid from republican America with my consent, and especially so long as she condemns to imprisonment and transportation for life the noble Irish patriots, whose only crime consisted in attempting that for which the great Hungarian is now idolized by the English people. She must do justice to Ireland, and the Irish patriots in exile, and to the masses of her own people, by relieving them from the oppressive taxation imposed to sustain the privileged classes, and by adopting republican institutions, before she can have my sympathy, much less my aid, even against Russia. I wish no alliance with monarchs. No republican movement will ever succeed so long as the people put their trust in princes. The fatal error committed in Italy, in Germany, in France, wherever the experiment was tried, consisted in placing a prince at the head of the popular movement. The princes all sympathized with the dynasties from which they were descended, and seized the first opportunity to produce a reaction, and to betray the people into the hands of their oppressors.

There is reason to believe that much of this was accomplished through British diplomacy and intrigue. What more natural? The power of the British Government is in the hands of the princes and the nobility. Their sympathies are all with the privileged classes of other countries, in every movement which does not affect the immediate interests of their own kingdom. Republicanism has nothing to hope, therefore, from England so long as she maintains her existing government, and preserves her present policy. I repeat, I desire no alliance with England. We require no assistance from her, and will yield none to her, until she does justice to her own people. The peculiar position of our country requires that we should have an *American policy* in our foreign relations, based upon the principles of our own Government, and adapted to the spirit of the age. We should sympathize with every liberal movement—recognize the independence of all Republics—form commercial treaties, and open diplomatic relations with them—protest against all infractions of the laws of nations, and hold ourselves ready to do whatever our duty may require when a case shall arise.

Returning to the immediate question before the Senate, I hold that a welcome to Governor Kossuth—a national welcome and a public reception by both Houses of Congress—is no cause of offence to any Power on earth. That the despotic Powers of the Old World would prefer to have us withhold from this distinguished champion of freedom every act of courtesy and evidence of sympathy, is doubtless true; for they would take his life, and consign his name to infamy, for the very deeds which endear him to every American heart and make him the representative of the liberal movement in the Old World. We love and honor him for the same reason that they hate and fear him. Hence we cannot regulate our action by their wishes. We should not act in abject obedience to the wishes of other nations, whose institutions are different from ours, nor in fear of their resentment. We should act in fear of God, performing our duty to ourselves and to mankind, and leave the world to form

its own opinion. I desire to extend this welcome to Governor Kossuth, because he is the recognized representative of the popular movement in Europe. The resolution does not commit us to anything in the future. It is no sufficient objection that Governor Kossuth may ask more for his country than we deem it consistent with the interests and honor of our country to grant. I repeat, we will judge of that question when it arises. I will not encourage the despots of Europe by our refusal in advance, nor will I mislead him by inciting hopes which may not be realized. Let us do our duty now, and reserve the right to do whatever American interests and honor and duty may require in the future.

